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McLean, Charles Oral History Interview: Sesquicentennial of Holland, "150 Stories for 150 Years"

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Oral History Interview with
Charles McLean

(unedited)

Conducted December 3, 1996
by June Reimink

Sesquicentennial Oral History Project
"150 Stories for 150 Years"

Sesquicentennial Oral History Project
Interview with Charles McLean
December 3, 1996
Interviewer: June Reimink

JR: I am June Reimink and I am visiting this afternoon with Chuck McLean.

CM: My first name is Charles. Middle initial M. Charles M. Mc Lean. I was named after my grandfather, who was in the sugar beet company. President and General Manager. He told me that in order to be proper I would have a number II behind my name because I was named after him with the same middle initial. He was a very nice gentleman. He did a lot of background work for the City of Holland and for Hope College.

JR: When were you born?

CM: I was born on May 29, 1912. I was born two minutes before midnight. My mother said if I had been born three minutes later, I would've been born on Memorial Day, early in the morning. Just a bunch of little stuff to add to the long Dutch image you're going to have.

JR: Where did you live when you were a little boy?

CM: For the first four years I lived on two places on Thirteenth Street, just east of River Avenue. Then my grandfather lived on Twelfth Street and I had two uncles that lived on Twelfth Street. So my father and mother and my grandfather wanted us to move a little bit closer. So it happened to be at 274 Maple Avenue. There were three houses at that time on Maple Avenue between Eleventh Street and Twelfth Street. My mother and father selected the house that was in the middle and we lived there all the

way through until 1937. Then we moved out by that time to the cottage that we had at Castle Park. It was able to be turned into a permanent home, and that's where my mother and father lived. It was interesting to many people. They couldn't understand where a certain McLean lived because they were all so close together.

JR: I bet! You confused people!

CM: My grandfather lived at 191 West Twelfth Street, and I had uncle Jim, who lived on Twelfth Street between Maple Avenue and Pine Avenue. Then there was a huge house where Aunt Rena Raven married the third son of my grandfather who was Harold McLean. Then Paul McLean lived out on Twenty-fourth Street and he became the first minister in the family. He was connected then with Hope College. He did a lot for Hope College and also for Castle Park.

JR: So you went to Washington School maybe?

CM: I went to Washington School and I finished there. This would be in 1930. I graduated from high school and then I went to college. First two years out east at St. Stephens and then came back and had two years at Hope College. Graduated from there in 1934. Then I went on to get a Masters degree in industrial relations at the University of Michigan.

JR: When did you meet your wife?

CM: I met my wife in 1942. She and her family lived in Cincinnati and they would summer in Michigan. The first summer they rented a cottage behind where we lived in Castle Park. In 1942, I was working for an industrial relations manager out of Chicago and he had offices in the Civic Opera Building. I was doing work for

Johnson and Johnson Medical Corporation. They had a branch in the suburb area of Chicago making Band-aids, and they wanted some industrial relations expert or consultant to come in. So I came in and was working in the Band-aid department finding how things could be moved past individuals so that it would be a smoother operation and they would get more per hour of band-aids completed. So being in that area, just a short drive to Castle Park, it worked out very nicely. They liked it so much, Castle Park, that they made reservations for the following summer. That property was owned by Roscoe Page. Roscoe Page was a Dutchman in the cheese business and that's how he was working for Johnson and Johnson. So it was my mother who told me when I came up from Johnson and Johnson on a long weekend. She said, "You ought to go down on the beach because there's a very nice girl there." Her folks lived right behind us. So I went down and made myself known and that's how we got acquainted and finally married.

JR: You have children?

CM: We have two. We have a daughter who does consulting work and she also does a lot of merchandising. She's been doing a lot of work at different locations out there at the Mall and they call her every now and then if they have an opening someplace and they haven't been able to get anybody within the management of the Mall to see if she would be interested. Sometimes she likes to change jobs because she has been doing that for so long. They have a permanent home in a cottage we used to have out there at Castle Park right on the lake front. Sheila and I also have a son, a grandson, that lives out in Boulder, Colorado. He's been married once and they ran into some

difficulty. So they separated. Philip now has been doing a lot of work for lawyers in difficult kinds of situations. They need information about somebody so they contact him. He can get the information that they want and maybe also some other information too.

JR: What was your total work experience? Did you stay with Johnson and Johnson in Chicago?

CM: I was an industrial consulting individual with Benge Associates out of Chicago. Eugene Benge would get the jobs for individuals, the industrial consultants that he had. He had six of us at one time. But usually it would be four.

JR: You went different places then?

CM: Yes. He would get the job, the work assignment, and find out what it was they wanted. He would also supply some information and he had individuals who would be able to go to the shop.

JR: When did you come back to Holland?

CM: We came back... I should also mention that we came to Cincinnati, because after World War Two, I couldn't find a job. But I was able to get one on a temporary basis for residents because Benge and I were unable to find a place where I could stay. I was just out of the service and nobody wanted to rent to somebody who was married and had one child and another one was on the way so we just had kind of a rough time until we got settled. I had no problem going around working but we had two children now and my wife, Sheila, wanted to have me situated a little bit longer.

JR: So you came back to Holland about when?

CM: I came back to Holland in 1942 and then I worked... it's difficult for me to remember but maybe it'll come up. There was one other thing. When Pearl Harbor occurred and World War II started when it just happened, Pearl Harbor, I was doing some work for the American Youth Hostel group. This was one of the jobs I was able to get. We were doing bicycling, getting groups to do bicycling, and we would stop at Youth Hostels on the way. So we could stay overnight. They also had, the American Youth Hostel, Incorporated, had a few individuals that would take groups of bicyclists out. They had places where they could stay overnight at youth hostels. I joined them because I thought it was interesting work. You can travel and you can bicycle. They also had pioneer hosteling trips out of the office in Northfield, Massachusetts, AYH, American Youth Hostel. They needed somebody to lead a group to Alaska. This was a pioneer group and they didn't have anybody. They wanted to know if I, because I was working out on the West Coast, if I didn't want to have a group. I said, "Is there going to be any enhancement?" They said, "What do you mean, enhancement?" I said, "Let's get down to brass tacks. Now you're going to increase my salary because nobody's ever done this before," - going up into Alaska, but they have in other places here in the United States. They said, "Well, we'll see what we can do." I said, "Don't wait too long because I do have someplace else where I can go." But I went along with them and we were the first group to bicycle through Alaska along what they call the Richardson Highway. We would bicycle about fifteen or twenty miles and then we would try to find a place where we could stay overnight. We would pay the housefather or the housemother or whoever,

pay them for our group. They just thought that was terrific and we had loads of fun. The first place that we stopped we had to walk up with our bicycles up a narrow highway. We got to the top and we got to a place where a lot of trucks were. So I went in to find out who the owner was and I told him and her what it was I had and what it was like and the housemother spoke up right away, Mrs. Joan, "I would just love to have you stay. You can stay as long as you like and I'll fix a little area for you and then you can come in and you can eat with us and I will have something." So we were going to do it just for one night, but we liked it so much, we did it for four nights and we got used to it. We found out two major things, we could bike up the Richardson Highway, and we could stop at any place where anybody was located and had gone to their home, but that was their place where they would vacation. We could stop and we could use anything that they had. We would go into the kitchen, open up the first cupboard door, and on the inside of a door the owner had a list of things that he had in the way of food items. Listed them alphabetically and also had what the cost was so we could figure out what we used. On the kitchen table was a large bowl and that was where the money went. Also, there was a woodpile for the stove and also for a fireplace out in the living room. We could use all the wood that we wanted to, but also, by the woodpile in the house, were directions where you could go to get more wood to replenish what wood you would use. Well, it was wonderful going up the Richardson Highway to Fairbanks. I said to one of the highwaymen, "How are they going to find out that we were along?" He said, "Well, don't worry. This is such an unusual group of youth that they are going to follow

you all the way!" So we were met up there in Fairbanks and they had someplace where we could go and we take the Steese Highway to the Yukon River. We could dip our big toe into the Yukon River, become Klondikes and veterans of the Alaskan Highway and all that stuff.

JR: So you had an interesting life!

CM: Then we could go the other way and we went to McKinley National Park and we had a fine time.

JR: I'll bet you did. So when you think about Holland, and you remember it from when you were a little boy, what do you think about the changes in Holland?

CM: Well, there are some things that I find out are still in existence. That is, they are interested, a family, a mother and father, are interested in what their son and daughter does. How much schooling they go to. They're also interested in their church life to see what it was, what it is like to go to church. I can remember going to church with my mother and father, went to Hope Church, and then after I came back from this Youth Hostel trip that I had, I found out that I could go to other... No! Before I went on this trip I was also doing bicycling for fun and I was going through high school. There was a girl that I liked very much and I asked her if I could have a date, if I could ask her parents. She said, "I don't know." I said, "Well, would you like to go with me somewhere?" She said, "Where?" I told her, I forgot the place. Oh she thought that would be fine. I said, "Well, how can I meet your mother and father?" She said, "I'll tell you what I'll do. Let me go back home and let me take a couple of days and tell my mother and father about the things I have

heard that are going on in school. There's a boy that I know that has asked me. He would like to have me join with him in doing some of these things." The father said, "Oh that would be fine." So everything went along nicely. I was able to go to church with her. We went to a Wednesday prayer meeting at their church. The father told me when we got into the church, "Now, Mrs. Smith will go in first, then my daughter and then you and me, and we'll all be sitting in the same pew in that order." I said, "Fine." We were able to hold hands together, the girl and myself, and we thought that was wonderful! Then I went home with them, picked up my bike and bicycled home myself. At six o'clock in the morning, I was awakened. My father said, "Chuck, you have to get up, get dressed and you have to see Mr. Smith because there's something's happened. You are supposed to take care of it and you forgot to do it." So I went out there and what it was, there were three drops of oil on his driveway and I had to take those drops of oil out. (laughs) I've never forgotten that.

JR: If you had moved to Holland from another area, and you really did when you came back to Holland, didn't you, what were your first impressions when you came back?

CM: Well, there is one thing that always has helped me and intrigued me and that is family life and growth together. There are so many families and it's the family that goes to church is also the family, a mother and a father, that see to it that their sons and daughters go to school. And if they have difficulty they know how to contact either the principal of the school or the teacher of the school. I can remember when I was in high school I took a course in botany and biology and I was able to find out other

schools in Holland that also had biology and botany because our teacher at Holland High School was Lida Rogers. She became the individual that was going to be doing... setting up background for the beginning of Tulip Time. That worked out very nicely.

JR: Now when you moved back to Holland, was Holland different than the place you left with your family?

CM: No. Living on Maple Avenue, that was pretty much the center of location for... this would be the western side of Holland, the sugar beet factory and the tannery and like that. I never had a problem.

JR: Do you see some negative things that have happened in Holland?

CM: I can remember when I was a junior or senior in high school counting the churches. There were fourteen separate churches that had their own members and it was unusual. Fourteen! The population of Holland at that time was about fourteen or fifteen thousand! So here are all these churches with just a little small difference in their religious thinking that made them pull away and form their own church. Fourteen churches in a population of 14,000! It was unusual! For example, let me bring it up to date a little bit. We know what has happened to the Catholic Church and the parish here in Holland now. Burned down. I can remember on the corner of Maple Avenue and Twelfth Street there was a German church there on the right hand corner when you were on Maple. The right hand corner between 12 and three o'clock there was a church there. An aufschieden church, a German church, and it isn't anyplace now that I can find out where it is. It's very interesting the

background of all the Holland people and how strong it is in going to church. If it's a new person coming in, why there's always somebody to welcome or find out a little bit about the person's background. "Now just wait a minute. Let me just get a member of the church that I can introduce you to and he'll be able to help you out." That stuck with me because when my wife and I joined a church, when we lived in this little village of Marymont outside of Cincinnati, we had to look for a minister for our church. So I joined the search committee and we went up north in Ohio. My wife and I got there early and we walked in to take a look at the church. Somebody came up and said, "Sir, would you be able to help out at church this morning?" I said, "That is not my duty today. I have another one. If you would excuse me, I've got my wife with me and we've got to do something." So that went along very nicely. Our church did select that individual to become our minister. I can remember very vividly, even right now, my wife and I when we went to church we always sat in the same pew, the same location. This minister in his first sermon, the first time he attended this church, it was just a small church, and it was built with materials that were brought over here from England. The minister, in that first sermon said, "Well before I get into my sermon I should explain to you a few things that are very interesting about the congregation I am speaking to this morning." Then he went on and said, "There's also one other thing I should let you know. That your search committee is very good and is very interesting how they operate. Because today, this morning, I can see a couple seated together and I can remember some of the things that this couple has done and what they have said. One thing I'll never

forget is that the male person of this couple said to the individual who was a member of the church, 'Sir, I'm sorry, but that is not my duty this morning.'" Everybody started to laugh. He said, "Well, as long as everybody is laughing I guess you probably know. But if you don't know, you can just say hi to Chuck McLean when you walk out of here and his wife Sheila." Oh, that was nice.

JR: Oh, that was nice, yeah. Now when you came back to Holland did you go back to Hope Church again? You were a member of Hope Church, you said, when you were a boy.

CM: Yeah, and then I went into the service. No. We didn't come back to Hope. We went to a church... way out there on 24th Street.

JR: Near the hospital?

CM: No, it's North Shore Drive. There's a road that goes past the Graafschap cemetery.

JR: Oh. Christ Memorial?

CM: Christ Memorial. Yeah, that's where we're going.

JR: Oh, that's where you were going when you came back to Holland. How do you think Hope College has changed since you went to Hope College?

CM: It's changed in many ways. The first thing that I can remember about Hope College when I went to school there and now, the money situation! What it costs now to go to Hope College in comparison to when I went. I could work my way through. Now the son or the daughter needs some additional help, either from the family or from the church itself, the body. Because they have broadened... the college has broadened their work if they wanted to stay in a good work relationship in the things that they

are doing and the academic work of their professors and also the student body. It's difficult I think for... I don't know how I would be able to handle it. All the money that is needed to go to school. If I didn't have parents residing in the same area that the college is located in, it would be difficult.

JR: Do you remember how many students there were in Hope College when you went?

CM: No. I can remember that the cost was \$400 a semester and I don't know what the cost is now.

JR: Many thousands I think.

CM: Yeah. You can add a couple of zeros. But I do think that, along with the increase in semester fees, there has been an increase likewise in the knowledgeability, the things that the college is doing on their own in broadening out the reaches that they have. I think it's remarkable.

JR: Do you remember what problems Holland was facing when you were a boy and when you think of the problems that Holland is facing today. Are they different?

CM: I don't know. It's difficult for me to answer that question. It must be that they still have some of the same problems but they handle them in a different way. Maybe those problems are different because the student enrollment is different, it comes from different areas. Although a large majority of the new students coming in appear to me to have some relative that has graduated from Hope, or somebody that has attended Hope and has not graduated but has gone on to a different school, but they get more information that way that they help out on.

JR: Can you remember one particular job you had in the last fifty years? Your favorite

one besides your bicycling? Is there something else that was a favorite job of yours in all of your work years?

CM: Well, I've always liked people and I think working with Bengie I had opportunity to work with people and also knowing that those individuals would go out and be able to do good work in their group or contacts that they would have.

JR: What do your new friends here at Freedom Village say about Holland? Some that don't know anything about Holland before? (Intercom announcement interrupts). Well, we'll go back on that one. When you have made new friends here at Freedom Village that don't know anything about Holland like you do, what do they say about Holland today?

CM: I try to find out what a main problem is that they have and if they say that they have several of them I'll say, "Well, let's see if we can't... we'll go over all of them, but what is the first one that you would like to have help with? Because if we can delineate that and setup what you need and I would be able to get you individuals to help you. Or you could go to get the help that you would want." They said, "Oh?" I said, "Well, if you have more than one, we'll just take it one step at a time." So that's the way it has been going on.

JR: Do they have a lot of problems with Holland, do you think?

CM: Well, what I try to do is try to talk to them to see what problems they are and how they have become affected by not being taken care of. Maybe in that way they will be able to come up and we'll be able to handle some of them. But if they can't, well, then we have a starting place.

JR: What do your children say about Holland? Your son and your daughter?

CM: Well, our daughter is here in Holland and our son is not. Our son, when he finished schooling, he wanted to do some outdoor things. He did. He started to. There was a friend of his who went to college but Phil didn't want to go. The father of the son said, "You get a friend of yours that you would like and have him be prepared to take clothing and everything and you and he can go out to my cabin in the foothills of the Rockies. I will provide all of the food and the expenses and everything that they two of you will need." The friend of Philip's said, "Well, how long?" He said, "Well, let me be a judge of that because I know that Philip has had a problem. That's the reason why he is not going. You had a problem but you stayed... you went into the Air Corps. Well, that's something new but you also had to go through, so let's see how it works out." Well, it has worked out fine for both of them. Philip has never come back, but he has found things that he can do out there. Now he is in a position where he is helpful to companies that have a problem in trying to get information from the metropolitan area of Denver and Boulder. Philip can do that. Also, on the activities that Philip has been doing, there are some that want to have a river rafting trip. Well, Phil loves river rafting and so he will go out and he will org... (tape ends)

JR: ...to visit sometimes? He comes back to Holland?

CM: We like to have Philip come back every year just for a short time. At first he was so busy it was hard for him to do it. But now he realizes that we're getting along in age, my wife and I, and so he comes and spends some time with us too.

JR: What does your daughter say about Holland? She's lived here for quite a while now?

CM: She and her husband have the house that we had out at Castle Park.

JR: You lived in that before you moved here?

CM: We lived in Cincinnati and then we visited here when they had the model and the office down there and Freedom Village was thought about. Then when things began to tighten up a little bit down in Cincinnati in regard to the work that I was doing, we came up here and got in touch and said we want to move in here. So we signed a statement and on the statement I wrote a sub note that we would have to sell our home in Cincinnati before we would be able to come in. It was a good thing that I did that because it took three more months to sell the place down in Cincinnati before we could move here. But we are glad! We like it here very much.

JR: Do you? Do you like Holland again?

CM: Oh yes. There are so many things here at Freedom Village that even some individuals don't even know about. It's difficult for them to get out, and the fact we have one of the nicest locations placed in Freedom Village. We've got a living room, and this is a work area. We can kind of rummage it up and then we also have a bedroom in the back. There isn't another location in Freedom Village here that is as high as this is because this is a ground floor apartment and all the ground floor apartments around here are large.

JR: It's a nice addition to Holland, isn't it?

CM: Yes. I can't think of his name. One that did everything...

No. A man who did so much for Holland. The underground warmth...

JR: Oh, Mr. Prince?

CM: Prince, yeah. He was wonderful.

JR: Well, any last thing you want to say about Holland before we turn the tape off? Any final words of wisdom?

CM: (Long pause) I can't think of anything. But if anybody listening to the tape wants to come in and see me or my wife, all they have to is give us a telephone call.

JR: Okay.

CM: Should I tell them what our number is?

JR: I think they have that in their records. Well, thank you very much.

CM: Well, anything that you want to say before we turn it off?

JR: I'm just happy to have had the opportunity to visit with you. It was a privilege for me.

CM: Well, if somebody has some more information they want to get from me, you tell them all they have to do is identify themselves...

JR: I will do that. I'll be sure to tell them that.

CM: We'll be able to sit down.

JR: Good! Well, thank you.

CM: You're welcome.

OBITUARIES

Nicholas Dekker, 83

Nicholas "Nick" Dekker, 83, of Holland, died Saturday, Dec. 27, 1997, at his home.

A lifelong resident of Holland, he was preceded in death by a son, Leonard, in 1950.

Married to Betty La Chaine in 1937, he worked at Holland Furnace and later Chemtron (BASf) until his retirement. He was a member of Beechwood Reformed Church for more than 45 years.

He is survived by his wife, Betty; children, Lee and Mary Dekker of West Olive, Gary and Diane Dekker of Holland, Ruth and Warren Jaarda of Hamilton;

13 grandchildren; five great grandchildren; sisters and brothers, Dorothy Ten Harmsel and Melvin and Marge Dekker, all of Holland; nieces, nephews and cousins.

Funeral services will be 1 p.m. Tuesday at the Northwood Chapel, Dykstra Funeral Homes, 295 Douglas Ave. The Revs. Marlin Vis and Chester Postma will officiate.

Visitation will be 7 to 9 p.m. Monday at the chapel.

Memorial contributions may be made to Beechwood Reformed Church Memorial Fund.

Charles M. McLean, 85

Charles M. McLean, 85, of Holland, formerly of Cincinnati, Ohio, died Tuesday, Dec. 23, 1997.

He was a member of Christ Memorial Church.

He is survived by his wife, Sheila; children Laurie and Howard Bustle of Holland, and Philip S. McLean of Boulder, Colo.; one granddaughter; two stepgrandchildren; and brother-

-in-law R. Sheridan and Jacquelyn Treis of Rohnert Park, Calif.

A memorial service will be 3:30 p.m. Tuesday at Freedom Village, 145 Columbia Ave.

Burial will be in Graafschap Cemetery.

Memorial contributions may be made to the McLean Scholarship Fund at Hope College or Hospice of Holland.

Harold Risselada, 81

NORTH LITTLE ROCK, Ark. — Harold "Hap" Risselada, 81, of North Little Rock, Ark., died Friday, Dec. 26, 1997. He was a member of Baring Cross Baptist Church, where he was a deacon, a greeter, and a Sunday school teacher.

He is survived by his wife, Dorothy; daughter, Sybil and Bill Adams of Hot Springs, Ark.; one granddaughter; and sister, Ella

Prins of Holland.

Funeral services will be 2 p.m. Monday, at the Baring Cross Baptist Church with the Rev. Marty Watson officiating.

Burial will follow in Edgewood Memorial Park.

Visitation will be 2-4 p.m. today at Roller-Owens Funeral Home.

Memorials may be made to Baring Cross Baptist Church.

Irene M. Williams, 91

Irene M. Williams, 91, of Holland, died Friday, Dec. 26, 1997, in a local care facility.

She was preceded in death by her husband, Franklyn, in 1992.

She is survived by her children: Richard and Deane Williams, Tom and Lois Williams, all of Holland, and Janice Anderson of Agoura, Calif.; nine grandchildren; and 14

great-grandchildren.

Memorial services will be 5 p.m. Saturday, Jan. 3, at the First United Methodist Church with the Rev. Bea Rose officiating.

Visitation will be 4 to 5 p.m. Saturday at the church. Memorial may be made to Hospice of Holland.

Arrangements are by the Dykstra Funeral Homes, Inc.

Medicare car

□ Beneficiaries will be guaranteed regular tests with expanded coverage, payments

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Clinton, with holiday reflections on the loss of his mother to breast cancer, outlined Medicare reforms that take effect New Year's Day to make cancer screenings less expensive for 39 million older Americans.

"Nearly every American family has been touched by the shadow of cancer," Clinton said Saturday in his weekly radio address. "By detecting cancer early on we offer our loved ones one of the greatest gifts of all — the gifts of life, health and many holidays to come."

Under the balanced budget

agreement, Congress will guarantee breast, cervical cancer, and colon cancer early detection tests to 100 percent of beneficiaries.

The expansion kicks

"We're year resolved in our battle of mankind," Clinton said.

His radio Christmas, morning just retired to a rainy afternoon. Clinton took day after, the House resided

Rebuilt surplus military weapons on nation's streets

CHICAGO (AP) — Thousands of powerful, rapid-fire military weapons are being rebuilt and sold to gun dealers for public distribution around the country, the Chicago Tribune reported.

More than a dozen gunmakers use scraps from the United States military and armies around the world to rebuild battlefield firearms, the Tribune reported in today's editions.

The sale of rebuilt military weapons demonstrates the inability of the nation's numerous gun laws to keep some of the most deadly firearms off the streets.

Surplus U.S. firearms that are not used in the Civilian Marksmanship Program, a government program to teach marksmanship and gun safety, are supposed to be destroyed or rendered inoperable. But gunmakers say the military does a poor job of crushing the guns.

Military officials say they do a thorough job of cutting up the weapons, and that the law does not allow them to prevent gun dealers from bidding on the scrap metal.

Anna Mills, 104

West Michigan Antique Mall